

Commission on Children and Youth

Annual Report

2018-2019



Montgomery County, Maryland
Commission on Children and Youth

Mission Statement

The Commission on Children and Youth promotes the well-being of Montgomery County's children, youth, and families so that all young people may realize their full potential and become contributing, productive adults.

The Commission advances its mission by: (1) identifying the needs of young people and their families, and the groups and agencies that serve them; (2) informing and advising the County Executive, the County Council, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Board of Education (BOE), and the community at large; (3) recommending policies, programs, funding, and legislative priorities; and (4) affirming the needs, aspirations, and achievements of all the County's young people.

Commission Structure

The Commission and its committees meet on the second Wednesday of every month (September to June) from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. The Youth Advisory/Leadership Committee meets from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. on the same evening. The Commission meetings are open to the public and are held at the Early Childhood Training Center located at 1401 Rockville Pike, Lobby Level, Rockville, MD 20852.

The scope of issues and priorities the Commission can address is broad and far-reaching. In order to focus its work, the Commission holds an annual strategic planning retreat in June and selects priority issues for the year. Subcommittees are formed around the selected priorities.

In 2018-2019, the Commission elected to prioritize:

- **Exploring ways to promote a positive approach to mental health and well-being that is accessible to a wide variety of the community**
- **Examining current initiatives, supports, and services in order to identify gaps, opportunities, and recommendations in providing a safe environment for students during non-instructional hours, including after school activities on campus**

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Letter from the Chair



November 1, 2019

**The Honorable Marc Elrich
Montgomery County Executive**

**The Honorable Nancy Navarro, President
Montgomery County Council**

**The Honorable Shebra L. Evans, President
Montgomery County Board of Education**

**Dr. Raymond Crowel, Director
Montgomery County Department of Health
and Human Services**

Residents of Montgomery County

Dear Mr. Elrich, Ms. Navarro, Ms. Evans, Dr. Crowel and Residents of Montgomery County,

The Commission on Children and Youth has completed another successful year exploring topics of importance to the County's children and youth in order to serve as advocates on their behalf. I was honored to serve as the Chair and am pleased to share this year's Annual Report.

This past year, our work focused on two areas: school safety and the mental health and wellness of youth. Subcommittees were formed to explore the topics, narrow our scope, and make specific recommendations for the needs of our county's children and youth. Our findings and recommendations are included in this report.

The Commission's youth members were very committed this year, addressing youth access to public transportation and organizing the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service activity. The youth commissioners collected data on youth public transportation ridership and advocated for Kids Ride Free. At the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service, they also spearheaded an effort to create mental wellness bags for distribution to children and youth, assembling over 200 of these bags. The Commission was able to distribute the bags to organizations supporting youth in Montgomery County.

In addition to our regular Commission work, we continued our traditional signature events: the Youth Having a Voice Roundtable and Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards. In its 12th year, the Youth Having a Voice Roundtable was held at the Silver Spring Civic Center and had the largest turn out so far. Youth were given the opportunity to discuss mental wellness, youth perspectives on school safety, access to public transportation as well as any other topics of concern. This forum is an evening dedicated to hearing directly from the county's youth facilitated

entirely by the youth commissioners while the adult community stakeholders listened. We always appreciate their candor and this year was no exception. More details on the Roundtable will be found later in this report.

The Commission held the 33rd annual Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards on May 23, 2019. The awards ceremony serves to acknowledge members of our community who provide outstanding service to youth in our county. We were fortunate to have an outstanding group of recipients and were honored to be able to celebrate their dedication to our county's children.

The Commission is committed to its mission and appreciates your support in our efforts. Our goal is to ensure that all of our county's children and youth have the opportunities to live their best lives. We look forward to working with you again in the coming year and welcome your thoughts and input into how we can be most successful.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kirsten Andersen", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kirsten Andersen
Chair

Membership 2018-2019

The Commission on Children and Youth has 27 membership positions including one representative from Montgomery County Public Schools; one representative from an independent school in the County; one representative from the Montgomery County Department of Recreation; and two representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services.

The remaining 22 members are equally divided among individuals with recent experience with agencies providing services to children and youth; youth and young adults; and parents.

Youth Representatives

Itamar Fiorino
Talia Nesin

Victoria Koretsky
Ashley Thommana

Parent Representatives

Cecily Adams
Dr. Leslie Copeland-Tune
Lynne Harris
Eric Rossen

Shruti Bhatnagar
Luciana Crotti-Espinoza
Assya Pascalev
Pamela Taylor

Private Agency Representatives

Kirsten Andersen
Stephanie Clark
Karen Duffy
Joseph Hooks
Chloe Perez

YMCA Youth & Family Services
Leaders Institute
EveryMind
480 Club LLC
Hearts and Homes for Youth

Membership 2018-2019

Public Agency Representatives

Jeanett Peralta	Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
Jerome Jackson	Montgomery County Department of Recreation
Rena McPherson	Montgomery County Public Schools

Commission Staff

Erin Stillwell	Program Manager, Early Childhood Services, Commission on Children and Youth
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Members of the Commission on Children and Youth attending the 2019 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service

Recommendations

Mental Health and Wellness

RECOMMENDATION #1

Ensure that youth serving organizations in Montgomery County, both public and private, are investing in the promotion of mental health and well-being of youth in Montgomery County

For the past two years, the Commission on Children and Youth (CCY) has focused on improvements within the county regarding the promotion of mental health and well-being among the youth of Montgomery County. In order to expand our knowledge on these topics and identify gaps in services, the Commission discussed issues with professionals and youth alike.

A main takeaway from these discussions was the importance of adopting a *proactive, preventive* policy as opposed to a reactive approach. Consequently, the Commission formulated the following recommendations which focus on promoting a trusting and accessible student-counselor relationship, increasing awareness and resource accessibility to create safe spaces for students and to enhance preventive strategies for youth mental wellness within the county.

1. To promote the mental well-being of children in Montgomery County, it is advisable to enhance both student and school personnel education on mental health by:
 - requiring all school personnel, including school health nurses, to participate in Mental Health First Aid Training
 - ensuring that School Resource Officers (SRO) receive trauma-informed training to understand and provide trauma focused interventions to youth who may have experienced trauma
 - expanding the health curriculum to teach students how to support and respond to peers who express or demonstrate signs or symptoms of emotional distress
2. Additionally, the Commission recommends expanding mental wellness resources within schools and the community by:
 - increasing the number and availability of trained mental health professionals (school counselors, social workers, etc.) to students, possibly by funding scholarships for studies in public health and other programs
 - holding a youth forum regularly, possibly every semester, regarding relevant mental health issues led by mental health professionals to facilitate open and productive conversations

Recommendations

Mental Health and Wellness-continued

Recommendations

- reviewing policies that eliminate barriers to promote trust between school-based counselors and students
 - publicizing mental health hotlines in school newspapers, newsletters, websites, and social media platforms to make easily accessible to students
 - expand funding for mental health services offered by the Montgomery County Crisis Center
3. Thirdly, recognizing the major impact the use of digital technology has on the physical and mental health of students, the Commission recommends fostering a healthy culture around the use of digital technology by:
- raising awareness among students, parents and teachers about the risks of screen overuse on the developing brain, on mental well-being and on eye and sleep health
 - providing education about the healthy use of digital tools recognizing that in the use of educational technology, one size does not fit all, and students will be better served by a multi-pronged approach.
 - adopting an individualized approach which accommodates the individual needs of students who may work better without technology, prefer paper/pen/book formats, or need to be screen-free for medical reasons. For these students, it is recommended that schools:
 - provide educational materials in paper format
 - create accommodations from students who learn differently and/or perform better using paper

Recommendations

Safe and Supportive Schools

RECOMMENDATION #2

Ensure a safe and supportive school environment for all students during instructional and non-instructional school time

The Montgomery County Board of Education unanimously passed a resolution focused on the safety of students and staff. Similarly, the State of Maryland passed the *Safe to Learn Act in 2018*. The Commission is concerned about a) balancing psychological and physical safety in Montgomery County schools, and b) providing a safe environment for students during non-instructional hours, including after school activities on campus.

The Commission has examined current initiatives, supports, and services in order to identify gaps, opportunities, and recommendations. The Commission applauds the increased focus on and commitment to school safety, and the increased infrastructure designed to ensure a safe and supportive school environment for our students. The following recommendations, in no particular order, are presented to help further the mission of promoting school safety throughout the county.

1. Ensuring that Montgomery County Public Schools and Maryland State Department of Education provide a comprehensive safety plan that includes language on psychological safety consistent with the existing inclusion of psychologists in community discussions.
2. Continue to provide annual reports of school safety and other related incidents in schools to the general public as well as:
 - trend analyses on existing school safety data, which would allow review of improvements over time and areas of continued concern
 - data on date, time & location of serious incident reports, including before and after school, to help identify trends on common spaces where incidents occur
 - To ensure transparency, include data from school safety evaluations on school data dashboards, unless those data points are considered sensitive, confidential, or would pose a threat by virtue of releasing to the public

Recommendations

Safe and Supportive Schools-continued

Recommendations

3. Create an interdisciplinary and interdepartmental task force to review school safety data as well as participate in future safety decision making. Members of this task force should include representatives from:
 - Elementary and secondary school settings
 - Teachers
 - Students
 - Parents
 - Office of School Support and Improvement
 - Office of Student and Family Support and Engagement
 - Office of Chief Operating Officer
 - Office of General Counsel
4. Design and implement a protocol for students to report incidents or safety threats during non-instructional hours. This protocol could include:
 - a format similar to that currently being used to report bullying, harassment and intimidation
 - utilize a secure, online format that could allow students to report threats and could be easily located and accessed from a phone, computer or tablet
5. Develop and provide training for teachers and school staff on how to respond when there is a physical fight or altercation; the training would need to include intervention protocols that extend beyond what is provided in the Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) training
6. Expand the work of the Athletics Supervision Action Plan to make it directly applicable to all activities outside of normal school hours and that all staff associated with those activities receive a training on this process
7. Ensure a consistent protocol is created and implemented for access to school facilities outside of school instructional hours.

Commission Activities

Guest Speaker Highlights

Dr. Raymond
Crowel, Chief,
BHCS, December
2018

Dr. Edward
Spector & Dr.
Clifford
Sussman,
February 2019

Testimony Highlights

Youth
Commissioner
Testimony at
Transportation
& Environment
Committee,
February 2019

Youth Having a
Voice
Roundtable
Report Out
Letter, March
2019

Guest Speakers

- On December 12, 2018, the Commission welcomed Dr. Raymond Crowel, Chief, Behavioral Health and Crisis Services, DHHS. Dr. Crowel shared an overview of Montgomery County's behavioral health system and current programs available to promote mental health and wellness.
- On February 13, 2019, Dr. Edward Spector and Dr. Clifford Sussman presented to the Mental Health and Wellness Subcommittee of the Commission on Children and Youth. Drs. Spector and Sussman both shared their professional knowledge and expertise on the impact of digital technology on the mental health and wellness of children, adolescents and young adults.

Presentations, Reports and Testimony

- On October 22, 2018 the Commission participated in the County Council HHS Committee roundtable discussion and communicated the top two policy priorities for the 2018-19 year.
- On February 28, 2019, youth commissioners provided testimony to the Transportation and Environment Committee of the County Council on proposed ideas to expand public transit options to youth in Montgomery County.
- On March 25, 2019, the Commission transmitted a [letter](#) to members of the County Council, Board of Education, Health and Human Services and Office of Student and Family Support and Engagement reporting out from the 12th Annual Youth Having A Voice Roundtable event. At this event over 50 youth from middle and high schools across the county shared their personal experiences on the following topics: mental health and wellness; school climate and school safety; and accessibility to public transportation.

Commission Activities

Presentations, Reports and Testimony-continued

- In May 2019, the Youth Advisory Subcommittee released a report on Public Transit Recommendations where they outlined two specific recommendations to expand the Kids Ride Free and Youth Cruiser SmartTrip card programs. Click [here](#) to view a copy of the Youth Advisory Subcommittee Pubic Transit Recommendations Report.
- In June 2019, the School Safety Subcommittee released a report that contained recommendations to help further the mission of promoting school safety throughout the county. Click [here](#) to view a copy of the school safety recommendations report.

Testimony & Report Highlights

Youth Advisory Subcommittee Report on Public Transit Recommendations for Youth, May 2019

School Safety Subcommittee Report with Recommendations, June 2019

Commission Activities

Activity Highlights

- MLK Day of Service January 2019
- 12th Annual Youth Having a Voice Roundtable February 2019
- 33rd Annual Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards May 2019

MLK Day of Service

On January 21, 2019, the Commission participated in the Montgomery County Volunteer Center MLK Day of Service at the Bethesda North Marriott Conference Center. Our youth commissioners, with the support of fellow adult commissioners, planned a service project focused around the topic of mental health and wellness. Working side by side with hundreds of eager volunteers, our commissioners packed over 200 self-care bags that were distributed to several local mental health nonprofits that serve youth in Montgomery County.

Youth Having a Voice Roundtable

The Commission hosted its 12th annual Youth Having a Voice Roundtable on February 7, 2019 at the Silver Spring Civic Building. A diverse group of students from local middle and secondary schools joined us for a profound discussion on mental health and wellness, school climate and safety and accessibility to public transportation.

The youth commissioners organized the event and facilitated the roundtable discussion. The youth participants were encouraged to be honest and their responses were both informative and reflective. Their candid answers provided adults in the room insights into youth experiences in Montgomery County.

Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards

On May 23, 2019 the Commission hosted its 33rd annual Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards at the Gilchrist Auditorium on the Rockville Campus of Johns Hopkins University. The Commission was privileged to once again present five awards to individuals and organizations whose dedication, vision and service to children and youth made a difference in the lives of others. The Commission was honored to have Councilmember Craig Rice present the award for the outstanding volunteer. Mr. Kelvin Dukes, guest performer and 2018 MoCo's Got Talent Winner, entertained the guests with his awe-inspiring vocal performance!

The award is named in honor of Dr. Nancy Dworkin, past chairperson for the Commission on Children and Youth who passed away in 1987. Dr. Dworkin was the Director of the Center for Unique Learners and her upbeat instructional philosophy focused on "teaching to strength" and encouraging all students to develop skills that would maximize their potential. Dr. Dworkin's philosophy is echoed in the Commission's purpose for establishing this Awards Program—encouraging each person to reach their own potential for providing service to others.

2019 Outstanding Service to Youth Awards



*EveryMind
Award Recipient, Outstanding Organization*



*Heather Guernsey
Award Recipient, Outstanding Youth Volunteer*



*Hassan Dixon
Award Recipient, Outstanding Volunteer*



*Shirley Reed
Award Recipient, Outstanding Service Provider*



*"The Inspirators" Walt Whitman High School
Butterfly Award for Outstanding Service to Youth*

Photos courtesy of Mr. John Leonard

Commission Priorities

2019-2020

Priority 1: Strengthening Youth and Law Enforcement Relationships

Recent events in Montgomery County and our surrounding communities have brought greater attention to the relationships between police departments and youth, particularly our youth of color. Recognizing the possibilities of miscommunication and lack of education on youth and authority relationships, the Commission on Children and Youth has selected the topic of “Strengthening Youth and Law Enforcement Relationships” as one of our priority areas for this year. The Commission will focus its work on examining means of educating students, law enforcement, and the community as a whole on the most effective strategies for communication that will help minimize hostile interactions and misunderstandings. At the conclusion of this work, the Commission hopes to offer recommendations on ways to build better relationships and enhance trust between the police, our youth and our communities as a whole. The Commission is also monitoring the progress of the proposed establishment of the Policing Advisory Commission. If Bill 14-19 is passed, the Commission will look to work collaboratively with this commission and share insights and recommendations.

Priority 2: Creating Truly Diverse Schools

The youth of Montgomery County have spoken eloquently and powerfully with the desire to have truly diverse schools, and not just a diverse school system. De Facto segregation is a real and significant problem within Montgomery County Public Schools. Research demonstrates that when students attend diverse schools the academic outcomes are better for all students. This year, the Commission hopes to explore all factors that contribute to de facto segregation and propose recommendations to address this issue.

Marc Elrich, County Executive
Dr. Raymond Crowel, Director of Health and Human Services
JoAnn Barnes, Chief, Children Youth and Family Services



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Commission on Children and Youth
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For more information about the Commission on Children and Youth, please visit:
www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccy

*Language translation and alternative formats of this report are available upon request.
For additional information on the Commission, please call or write at the address and telephone numbers listed above.*

Montgomery County does not discriminate on the basis of disability in employment or in the admission/access to its programs and services.